# Social Connectedness Fellowship Program

Partnership Proposal

**SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS**

# Partnership Proposal

**Partner Organization:** HelpAge Canada

The HelpAge Canada Mission is to work in partnership with others to improve and maintain the quality of life of vulnerable older persons and their communities in Canada and around the world.

HelpAge Canada is proud of its flagship pan-Canadian programs, all of which seek to address isolation and loneliness by promoting social inclusion and protection in a variety of ways:

**Digital Literacy:** providing low-income seniors with access to devices and age friendly digital literacy education.

**Seniors Can!:** offering grants to seniors to access mobility equipment, wellbeing and support services, and innovative social programming.

**Age Friendly Transportation:** an integrated pan-Canadian platform for age friendly transportation, currently focused on identifying transportation solutions and ideas that will improve senior mobility across Canada.

We work internationally through HelpAge International in humanitarian intervention and development, currently in Ethiopia. Our Sponsor a Grandparent Program, operated in India, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Haiti, Jamaica, and Dominica, supports over 500 older persons and their communities with food, water, shelter, medicine, clothing, cash assistance and income generation.

**Location of Fellow:**

HelpAge Canada is headquartered in Ottawa and thus tends to operate predominantly on eastern standard time. To date the team has been working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will be flexible to the location of the fellow given our ability and comfort to work remotely and the unknown landscape ahead of us as it relates to the pandemic.

## Description of Proposed Project:

**Project Need:** Low digital literacy, that is the ability to use information communication technologies and the internet to find and evaluate information as well as create content, is a key barrier to social inclusion and wellbeing for older adults. Although older adults vary in their familiarity and comfort with different types of technologies, generally, those who are oldest and poorest have the lowest digital literacy and the least positive views toward the benefits of online platforms and technologies.[1]

A recent study by AGEWELL (Access to technological-based supports for low-income income older adults – 2019-2020) examined critical barriers and enablers of access to technology-based supports for low-income older adults, as well as examples of how these can be addressed by federal/provincial/territorial governments and community organizations. One of the three recommendations was to *develop digital literacy programs for low-income older adults and their family members.*

For these reasons and based on what our national network of senior serving community organizations affirmed as a priority area of support required, we have identified digital literacy education as a flagship program area for HelpAge Canada. To date, we have developed and implemented both regional and national digital literacy programs.

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[1] Grigorovich, Alisa. *2019-2020: Access to Technological-Based Supports for Low-Income Income Older Adults.* AGEWELL, https://agewell-nih-appta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/FINAL-AGrigorovich.pdf.

We are asking the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness Fellow to pick up where we have left off in terms of the evaluation of impact and effectiveness of our digital literacy programs, and to strengthen HelpAge Canada expertise about digital literacy education best-practices for low-income older adults. The importance of this is further supported by the same AGEWELL report, which identified that *there was insufficient evidence found to determine which types of supports or delivery mechanisms are most effective, under what conditions, and for which individuals* [regarding technology-based supports and services].

**Project Overview:** The Fellow will develop a research and evaluation program that will examine the impact (outcomes) of HelpAge Canada digital literacy programs, as well as other digital literacy programs currently being delivered across North America whose target audience is low-income or otherwise marginalized older adults. They will examine academic findings about effective approaches to building digital literacy and compare this to their observations about the unique needs for low-income and marginalized older adults specifically. The Fellow may choose to explore questions of identity and belongingness in a virtual environment in their research. It is anticipated that the bulk of this research will be undertaken via semi-directed stakeholder interviews (with seniors, program delivery personnel of community-based senior serving organizations, leaders in the space of digital literacy, volunteers and employees providing direct training to seniors, etc.) and informed and supported by academic literature reviews.

The above activities will ultimately lead the fellow to form an in-depth understanding of the digital divide in Canada, as experienced by Canada's most marginalized older adults. The Fellow will leverage this knowledge to make recommendations as to formal social supports (programs, services, etc.) can best be improved to help bridge this divide.

The Fellow is ultimately responsible for the design, development, and execution of the research project. **Key tasks will include:**

- Lead an academic literature review that focuses on some or all of the following:
    o best approaches to supporting older adult digital literacy
    o barriers and enablers of digital literacy
    o loneliness and belonging as experienced by marginalized older adults
    o identity and belonging in a digital context

- Conduct general research and mapping to identify leading programs and experts in age-friendly digital literacy in North America.
- Review HelpAge Canada program evaluation reports and surveys.
- Support the creation of the research paper by
    o Developing stakeholder interviews
    o leading several semi-directed stakeholder interviews (by phone or video conferencing).
- Analyze findings, draw conclusions, and develop a final report 25-30 page report.
- Design and create a poster that captures the findings of the project.
- Ensure proper ethics, permissions, etc. are accounted for in research program design.
- Develop and adhere to a project workplan with associated milestone dates and deliverables.
- Work effectively with the Director and Manager of National Programs at HelpAge Canada to effectively execute this project.

**Skills, Education and Background Required:**
- Relevant undergraduate education focused on sociology, gerontology, education, etc.

- Excellent planning organizational skills & ability to effectively document, organize & categorize research, including qualitative research derived from semi-directed interviews
- Strong research skills, experience in conducting best practice scans & literature reviews
- Creativity in research approaches: will require both traditional academic research and more exploratory internet-based research to identify programs, experts, etc. in the field
- Strong initiative, time management and project management skills to plan and lead the research project.
- Exceptional communication and interpersonal skills to effectively conduct interviews with a variety of stakeholders:
    o Strong writing skills to develop interview questions
    o Strong facilitation and oral communication skills to adjust interview approach and techniques for varying stakeholders
- Strong analytical skills to draw comparisons between observations and academic literature and to surmise recommendations for HelpAge Canada
- French language skills considered an asset


## Key Deliverables:

(1) **Final Report:** One final 25 - 35 page report to be posted on the SCSC website. This report will summarize the findings and best practices in digital literacy, highlight examples of leading programs in North America, identify recommendations to improve formal social supports (programs and services) that will help bridge the digital divide for the most marginalized Canadians

(2) **Interview Questionnaires:** which will be used by the Fellow to guide their qualitative research project.

(3) **Recommendations for HelpAge Canada specifically regarding our delivery program design, delivery and impact.**

   a. **Development of an Evaluation Survey for HelpAge Canada** to use ongoing to evaluate digital literacy program delivery and impacts.

(4) **Poster Presentation:** this is a creative deliverable that will allow the Fellow to choose a particular element from this research project to focus on and showcase on a poster. This may be in anticipation of a conference they plan to attend or may be developed for upcoming HelpAge Canada conferences (or both).

(5) **Blog Post:** this is a creative deliverable that will allow the Fellow to further explore and lend their perspective to an element of this research project. This will be posted on the SCSC website and can be cross posted by HelpAge Canada.

## Goals:

The HelpAge Canada Mission is to work in partnership with others to improve and maintain the quality of life of vulnerable older persons and their communities in Canada and around the world. This project is directly in line with our organizations mission and responds to the Project Need identified above which identifies a gap in this area of research and knowledge in Canada.

Further, this research will be directly translated into tangible program design and delivery improvements for HelpAge Canada digital literacy programs which will improve the wellbeing of seniors across Canada. HelpAge Canada's digital literacy program outcomes are defined as

follows. Ongoing program improvement and enhancements will only strengthen our ability to achieve these objectives.

*Connected to Others:* older adults will stay connected with their families, loved ones and support networks through technology. They may be introduced to new online communities.

*Confident and Informed:* to reap the benefits of technology and feel comfortable to make it a part of routine, older adults must be aware of safe online practices. Privacy and security protocols should be engrained in digital literacy and online programs to ensure that seniors are protected as they impart on their digital journey.

*Independent:* with increased access to information, health and support services (amongst other areas), older adults will live more independently.

*Quality of Life:* older adults will have increased access to education, recreation, social and other programs, resources and opportunities that bring them happiness.

*Empowered:* older adults will become empowered as they build digital literacy capacity allowing them greater access to information and to participate in the decisions that affect them – giving older people voice.

Lastly, this project is also directly in line with the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness mission: *to build connectedness within and between communities through partnerships, research, programming, learning initiatives, and advocacy*. We cannot talk about inclusion and belonging today without considering how this is experienced for our older citizens and in a digital context.

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